

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

The presently claimed process for cleaning tray columns involves conveying a basic liquid downward through the tray column and passing a gas through the tray column countercurrent to the basic liquid where a difference between a pressure in the gas immediately below a lowermost tray of the tray column and a pressure in the gas immediately above an uppermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column is at least 0.5 mbar per tray. The cited reference (Neutzner, WO 01/51159 A1) does not teach or suggest the claimed process.

Neutzner describes a process of cleaning stripping columns in order to remove volatile components. The cleaning is carried out at from less than atmospheric pressure to pressures > 1.5 bar (page 11 of Neutzner). The process also utilizes an alkaline solution flowing downward within the stripping column and the alkaline solution is heated by heat exchangers, electric heaters or steam (page 10). The steam can be introduced into the stripping column at a pressure of 4 or 16 bar. However, this heating steam does not mean that the stripping column has a pressure gradient throughout the column. In fact, Neutzner does not teach or suggest the claimed difference between a pressure in the gas immediately below a lowermost tray of the tray column and a pressure in the gas immediately above an uppermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column of at least 0.5 mbar per tray. Indeed, Neutzner does not discuss a pressure difference within the stripping column at all, and in fact, suggests that the cleaning process is conducted at a constant pressure (see page 11, lines 5-9). Specifically, Neutzner states that the cleaning process is frequently conducted at atmospheric pressure within the stripping column (page 11, line 18). Accordingly, for this reason alone, the claimed process would not have been obvious over Neutzner.

The Examiner concluded that a pressure drop occurs in the stripping column during the process described in Neutzner because gas may be moved through the column. However, moving gas can have the same pressure at the top and bottom of the column giving no pressure gradient at all. Accordingly, the Examiner's pressure drop conclusion is an assumption not supported in Neutzner since Neutzner does not describe or suggest creating a pressure gradient within the stripping column. Since, no pressure gradient over the trays is taught or suggested by Neutzner, the claimed process would not have been obvious over Neutzner and Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner withdraw the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Neutzner.

In light of the above remarks contained herein, Applicants respectfully submit that the present application is now in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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